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Archival Appraisal Policy and Implementation Plan
LS557: Archival Appraisal
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Attributions and Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and thank the University of Virginia's Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library for the use of their published appraisal policies listed below. This publication relies on them for structure and content.

<https://www.library.virginia.edu/special-collections/collections/collection-development-policy/>

Our Strategic Collecting Mission

The Georgia College & State University Archives and Special Collections serves Georgia College & State University (GCSU) as its principal repository for university archives, rare books, manuscripts, and the documentation of the history and culture of Milledgeville/Baldwin County and its contiguous counties, ensuring that the lives and experiences of our diverse communities receive historical recognition and representation. Our staff conscientiously and strategically develop collections which support the missions of GCSU and the Ina Dillard Russell Library by acquiring, preserving, and making accessible materials which document the depth and diversity of our cultural record.

We build collections to enrich public liberal arts at Georgia College, which challenges its students to think clearly and creatively by exploring ideas and methods through the multi-disciplinary lens of the humanities, social sciences, and the arts. In fulfilling our mission, we seek to employ a conscious and reparative collecting model, prioritizing the use of our collecting

resources to acquire materials created by and documenting the experiences of underrepresented voices and communities.

Principles

We acquire materials that serve the GCSU community. We do this not just by fulfilling existing research needs, but by building collections that generate research and teaching initiatives and by helping lay new intellectual paths for our faculty, students, and our shared communities residing outside of the university.

We also acquire materials that serve our diverse local, regional, national, and international research community. The unique nature of our Flannery O'Connor holdings means that we are the primary site globally for research on this subject.

We avoid acquiring materials which are unlikely to receive appreciable use by our research and instruction communities. If a potential donation falls outside our collecting scope, we can often recommend other libraries committed to stewarding similar collections.

We believe it is important to keep collections together. We avoid acquiring archival material that should be part of a collection located at another institution.

We employ a reparative collecting strategy. Our collections skew towards documenting only some creators, communities, organizations, and national cultural histories. Past collecting methods have resulted in most of the documentation being invested in white men of economic privilege. Such practices have led to significant gaps in the archival and bibliographical record that inevitably limit scholarship and do not support a full range of instruction opportunities.

To address this issue, we prioritize using our resources to acquire materials that document under-collected voices. This work includes supporting community collection building: we are eager to provide advice and support when wanted by members of the relevant community who are not interested in transferring their collections to an institution.

We employ an ethics of care framework when evaluating acquisitions. An ethics of care approach emphasizes the consideration of impacts that our acquisition, description, and access decisions will have upon all individuals associated with the collection.

We employ a holistic collecting strategy. We build upon existing strengths to support research and knowledge creation. We expand into new collecting areas when there are compelling reasons and appropriate resources to do so. It is a high priority to address collection imbalances by collecting creatively and proactively. We avoid replicating the research strengths of other institutions unless there are compelling reasons to develop comparable or complementary collections at GCSU. And we assess the impact of acquisitions on every part of our operation.

How we make decisions

The GCSU Archives and Special Collections has the capacity to acquire and steward only a small percentage of the materials offered by donors and dealers. Therefore, we are highly selective in what we add to the collection. Before we accept donations or make purchases, whether of single items or a sizable collection, we carefully assess such factors as condition, fit with collections strategy, gift terms, and anticipated processing, conservation, and storage costs. There is no set formula. Decisions reflect institutional objectives, which may differ from a donor's objectives in building the collection under consideration. Archival staff work actively to

be aware of the biases we bring to the work as a result of our identities, education, and intellectual interests, and to ensure that such biases are kept in check through active engagement with users, fellow library staff, and our local community.

Criteria

Scope: We collect broadly in terms of chronology, subject, and format to support the University's teaching and research objectives and to meet our mission to illuminate diverse narratives that are regionally and historically representative. We cannot collect in every field or accept every gift. As we consider materials, we address the following key issues: Does the material usefully advance the mission of GCSU and Special Collections? Does the material justify the anticipated costs of processing, preservation, and permanent retention?

Age will not by itself determine whether an item is appropriate for our collections. Old books are not necessarily rare or of high research value, and we may add in-print publications to ensure that a copy survives in perpetuity. Archives of living individuals and those of active organizations may be acquired with the expectation that future materials may be added.

Condition is of major importance. We carefully assess the condition of collections and items in all formats to determine whether we have the capability to steward them. We avoid acquiring materials in poor physical condition, for example, badly stained and soiled, mildewed, very brittle, damaged binding, unless their rarity or intrinsic importance offsets the physical defects.

Completeness and physical integrity are also highly important. We avoid acquiring printed materials that lack pages, illustrations, portions of text, or publisher's binding, or have been sophisticated, unless their rarity or intrinsic importance offsets these defects. Such imperfections

greatly reduce an item's research and instructional value; we prefer to wait for the opportunity to acquire a complete copy in sound condition.

Donors are asked to avoid rearranging and culling archival collections, such as inherited personal papers in physical and digital form, until our staff have an opportunity to discuss and, ideally, view the materials in person. Often, materials that may seem worthless have significant research value; likewise.

We generally avoid acquiring archival collections of an individual or organization if another repository is already the established "home" for archival research on that subject. We encourage donors to offer additional material to the home repository first, and we are happy to put donors in contact with the relevant staff there.

Duplicate copies of printed materials: We do not add true duplicates, such as copies that are textually identical to, and display no bibliographical variants from, those already in our collection. Commonly offered exact duplicates include copies of the Georgia College yearbook, *The Spectrum*, most of which we already hold in multiple copies. We do selectively acquire added copies bearing copy-specific features we consider useful for research, instruction, or exhibition.

Artifacts and memorabilia: Often, archives are accompanied by artifacts and memorabilia that provide important context to the archive's subject. For this reason, we acquire three-dimensional objects on a highly selective basis due to the high and ongoing costs of processing, conserving, and storing these items.

Fine and decorative arts: We acquire selectively in the area of fine and decorative art objects and collections. When offered artworks as potential gifts, we will make decisions in accordance with the University gift policy.

International regulations: Some materials we consider for acquisition may be subject to laws concerning the export of cultural property. We will not acquire such materials unless the donor furnishes proof of legal export.

Restrictions

We are invested in making our collections available openly to all users to the fullest extent possible. However, in certain situations, we apply restrictions at the point of acquisition, for reasons of ethical best practices and federal and state law. Examples include redaction of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) that goes beyond directory-type information. Examples of directory information include name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and in the case of university records, dates of attendance. Collections that contain student records will be restricted according to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Collections containing protected health information (PHI) remain confidential and are subject to restrictions due to ethical and privacy concerns.

Deaccessioning

From time to time, we may identify materials, ranging from single items to entire collections, appropriate for deaccessioning. These may include materials identified as exact duplicates or damaged beyond repair, deemed out of scope during processing, or reappraised in consideration of updates to the collection development strategy. Materials considered for deaccession are

carefully reviewed and, as appropriate, deaccessioned in compliance with any donor agreements or legal restrictions, professional best practices, and professional standards. Deaccessioned materials may be transferred to another repository; returned to the donor if applicable; sold, disposed of, donated or transferred in accordance with GCSU surplus property policies; or destroyed as appropriate. We do not monetize our collections by deaccessioning materials to raise funds.

Policy Justification

Our appraisal policies ensure we invest in the future of Georgia College & State University and the communities we serve: students, faculty, staff, and citizens. Our aim is to generate a consistently high ‘return’ on this investment by developing our collections as effectively as possible through thoughtful, strategic decision making that builds upon our existing strengths in order to support research, knowledge creation, and societal evidence. To undertake this mission, our collection development will be guided by our policy’s outlined principles to prioritize the acquisition of materials that are not widely held and to expand into new collecting areas only when there are compelling reasons to do so. The purpose of our policy is to provide theoretical prompts to guide our department in moments of acquisition and retention decisions; such as, when considering such an expansion, we must weigh whether we are committed to building upon the initial acquisition to support it as an area of research, whether existing collection areas will lose resources so we can support this new area, and does our staff have the expertise to steward the materials and future acquisitions responsibly. By following our policy strategy, we will ensure the most effective use of our limited resources and that our institution’s holdings remain distinctive and less duplicative from those in other libraries. The uniqueness of our holdings is

furthered by the implementation of an overarching reparative collecting strategy that prioritizes the acquisition of materials that document under-collected voices, paired with the active archival documentation of communities whose experiences are at risk of going uncollected.

Policy Implementation

Appraisal and disposal should be a continuing and systematic process undertaken with the guidance of an agreed upon department-wide strategy that contributes to our outlined archival principles and the mission of GCSU. Effective appraisal, retention and disposal is dependent on an effective records management program that controls records throughout their life cycle. The GCSU Archives and Special Collections facilitates institutional alignment with the [Records Retention Schedule](#) and the [Records Retention Guidelines](#) established by the University System of Georgia. By following these guidelines Georgia College will maintain compliance with federal and state law, including the Georgia Records Act. Georgia College adheres to the [BOR Policy](#) on Records Retention. Additionally, GCSU Archives and Special Collections is responsible for complying with federal and state statutes and professional best practices that provide for the respectful treatment and disposition of objects of cultural patrimony, human remains and specific classes of cultural items, included sacred ceremonial objects, encountered on state and private lands from the time of encounter until repatriation. To this end, one of our core responsibilities is to ensure that protected cultural items are identified and treated with respect and dignity, in compliance with Georgia College & State University's policies, regulations and guidelines from the Georgia Department of Historic Preservation and the United Nations [Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), and all established Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act [requirements](#). These principles inform our

practices of acquisition, documentation, preservation, access, and description of such objects.

Whenever possible, we aim to work directly with stakeholders to ensure proactive policy development and improved practices.

The implementation of our policy will require staff to receive training workshops of pertinent state and federal record schedules and retention policies, and best practices on the respectful treatment and disposition of objects of cultural patrimony, human remains and specific classes of cultural items, included sacred ceremonial objects, encountered on state and private lands from the time of encounter until repatriation. Furthermore, implementing an ethics of care approach in archival work emphasizes the consideration of impacts that our acquisition, description, and access decisions will have upon all individuals associated with the collection. Training in radical empathy will be required to ensure our processes center the needs of those who are most oppressed by the dominant forces of white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, capitalism, ableism, and colonialism. Radical empathy is meant to resituated power, preventing those with access to power from further embedding themselves into power-dynamic hierarchies; but instead, open doors to “make archives permeable by creating holes in our structures and systems where power can be redistributed in ways that always prioritize the needs and desires of those made vulnerable by oppressive structures.”¹ By supporting a labor of care, we uphold Caswell’s and Cifor’s assertion that “records are not the most important aspect of archival work; people are,” and we

¹ Caswell, Michelle and Marika Cifor. “Revisiting A Feminist Ethics of Care in Archives: An Introductory Note,” in “Radical Empathy in Archival Practice,” eds. Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez, Jasmine Jones, Shannon O’Neill, and Holly Smith. Special issue, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3, no. 2 (2021).

acknowledge that “archival work should not just center people, but the needs, realities, and lives of oppressed people specifically.”²

Policy Assessment Layers of accountability reside in archival appraisal. First is the proper implementation of appraisal procedures within the daily work of the institution. Second, the accountability of the appraisal process itself, and if it is meeting the organization’s goals. And lastly, organizational leadership’s accountability for the responsible fulfillment of the institution’s mandate. The Society of American Archivists (SAA) states that archival institutions should be able to self-evaluate their organization and explain their strategy to those outside of the profession.³ To assess our program, we will utilize the Guidelines for Evaluation of Archival Institutions, produced by the SAA Task Force on Institutional Standards, and updated by the SAA Committee on Institutional Evaluation. The guidelines provide an objective framework against which an archive can measure their effectiveness in implementing and diversifying their archival institution and holdings. Additionally, to inform an accountability framework, we will abide by the International Council on Archives’ Code of Ethics insistence that archivists should record, and be able to justify, their actions on archival materials, by advocating “good recordkeeping practices throughout the life-cycle of documents,” and keeping “a permanent record documenting accessions, conservation and all archival work done.”⁴ This practice will

² Ibid., 2.

³ “Guidelines for Evaluating Archival Institutions.” Guidelines for Evaluating Archival Institutions | Society of American Archivists. Accessed April 22, 2022. <https://www2.archivists.org/groups/standards-committee/guidelines-for-evaluation-of-archival-institutions>.

⁴ International Council on Archives Code of Ethics. International Council on Archives. Accessed April 22, 2022. https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/ICA_1996-09-06_code%20of%20ethics_EN.pdf

ensure our archival work is documented and is available for assessment over the life span of the archival institution and our holdings, facilitating the investigation of the effects of societal changes on the appraisal process and that these changes are noted and addressed as necessary.